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EXECUTIVE BOARD

Special session on a world summit for children

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 11th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 20 December 1989, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Ms. DIEGUEZ (Mexico)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.35 a.m.

DISCUSSION ON THE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (continued) (E/ICEF/1989/15)

1. Mr. FORTIER (Canada), speaking on behalf of the initiators of the project for the convening of a world summit for children, observed that such a meeting at the highest political level would be the best way of focusing the international community's attention on the plight of children and provide the best opportunity for making strong political commitments on their behalf. To that end, it would be desirable for the widest possible range of leaders to take part in the summit, whose budget should be administered with the greatest care.

2. Despite extensive consultations, the members of the Executive Board had not reached agreement on the draft proposals presented by the initiators on the one hand and by Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom on the other; the third proposal, focusing on the budget estimates for mobilization activities, had been submitted by Barbados. Shared views had, however, been reached on a number of points: first, a world summit was indeed a worthwhile undertaking; second, the preparations for the summit and the resulting declaration should be thorough; third, participation in the planning of the summit should be open to a larger number of countries; fourth, various United Nations bodies, such as WHO, UNESCO, and UNDP, should be associated with the initiative; fifth, UNICEF should provide secretariat support for the summit; sixth, the summit should be cost-efficient and the strictest budgetary procedures should be adopted and respected; and seventh, the consultations concerning the date of the summit should continue.

3. The initiators had demonstrated flexibility with a view to meeting the concerns of certain members of the Executive Board. They had even prepared a non-paper, which to some extent merged the various proposals. Nevertheless, a fundamental difference remained: the States members of the Executive Board had not reached agreement on summit arrangements for a meeting at the highest possible level, which was the only way of attaining the desired objective. The initiators did not deny the value of holding the summit in conjunction with the opening of the forty-fifth session of the General Assembly, especially from the standpoint of participation and publicity. They did, however, wish to emphasize that the summit was the result of a personal initiative on the part of their leaders at the highest political level and should not become yet another United Nations conference or a UNICEF summit. If the planning committee was to be efficient, it should be neither a committee of the whole nor an open-ended committee. Nevertheless, in a spirit of conciliation, the initiators had invited 10 additional countries to become members of the committee and were ready to accept others if necessary. They had from the outset wished to keep the Executive Board of UNICEF involved with the summit and their statement of agreement provided that the principal policy recommendations regarding the agenda and proposed substantive product of the summit would be shared with the Executive Board of UNICEF for review and comment. Lastly, believing that the summit should be carefully prepared, they regretted that the two sets of budget

(Mr. Fortier, Canada)

estimates presented contained neither a description nor a timetable of activities.

4. Since the Executive Board had currently reached an impasse, he suggested that the special session should be suspended and reconvened at a later date so that delegations could engage in consultations. The proposed initiative had no precedent and called for imaginative initiatives on the part of the Executive Board. It was to be hoped that UNICEF would meet the challenge: if not, the children of the world would be the losers.

5. Mr. MAJOOR (Netherlands) welcomed the initiative taken by the Governments of Canada, Egypt, Mali, Mexico, Pakistan and Sweden calling for the convening of a world summit for children. The summit should be related to UNICEF and the United Nations and should be efficiently prepared. He agreed that UNICEF should provide secretariat support for the summit but would like the preparatory process to be open and transparent. If the Executive Board of UNICEF endorsed the holding of such a summit, it should also be able to take the ultimate responsibility for it, and especially for the substantive preparations. The sponsors of draft proposal E/ICEF/1989/CRP.33 did not intend to make the summit a United Nations conference. However, if the Secretary-General conveyed the invitations to the summit in the name of the six initiators, the Executive Board of UNICEF should have a say regarding the substantive preparations for the summit. The Secretary-General of the United Nations would be acting on the instructions of the Executive Board, which was ready to take a decision to that effect, without being willing to limit its responsibilities.

6. It would be possible to adopt a formula whereby a steering committee would be established, composed of the six initiators and possibly other States as well, which would report to the Executive Board. That proposal would enable the initiators to play a leading role: they would assume certain responsibilities and the Executive Board could give them all the support necessary to make their initiative a success. He was ready to continue the consultations if the initiators so wished.

7. Dame Nita BARROW (Barbados), speaking on behalf of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, observed that the statements by the representative of Canada and the representative of the Netherlands were not mutually exclusive. Emphasizing that the well-being of children required the immediate attention of the international community and that the opening of the forty-fifth session of the General Assembly seemed the most appropriate time for the convening of a summit, she appealed to all the relevant parties to come to an agreement and demonstrate flexibility so that the preparations for the summit could go ahead.

8. Mr. GALAL (Egypt), recalling that despite the initial diversity of opinions, the General Assembly had reached a consensus concerning the Convention on the Rights of the Child, expressed the hope that the six-Government initiative would meet with wide acceptance in the international community. He endorsed the comments of the representative of Canada, who had explained the position of the six

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(Mr. Galal, Egypt)

initiators at length, and paid a tribute to the constructive spirit demonstrated by Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom during the informal negotiations. It would be desirable for all the members of the Executive Board to demonstrate flexibility.

9. He sincerely hoped that the United Nations would play a role in the summit from the outset, but he found it difficult to accept the idea that the Executive Board of UNICEF should take the ultimate decisions regarding all matters concerning the summit, for that was not in keeping with the spirit of the proposal of the six initiators. He had noted the comments of the States members of the European Community concerning the budget for the summit. He would, however, find it difficult to be associated with a summit which had little chance of success, either because proper arrangements to ensure participation at the highest level had not been made or because the agenda had not been comprehensive enough, which might weaken the results. In conclusion, he associated himself with the comments to be made by the representative of Liberia on behalf of the African States.

10. Mr. JARRETT (Liberia), speaking on behalf of the African group, said that the proposed summit would make a useful contribution to the survival and development of children, that participation in the summit should be at the highest level and that the summit should take place as soon as possible, preferably on 26 and 27 September 1990 during the forty-fifth session of the General Assembly. Preparations for the summit should be undertaken by a planning committee established on the basis of equitable geographical distribution and working in close consultation with the Executive Board of UNICEF, which should be assigned an important role.

11. In order that the preparatory work might begin as soon as possible, the African group recommended, for the summit and the mobilization activities budget floors of $700,000 and $1 million and budget ceilings of $1.5 million and $2.5 million respectively. It approved of the procedure proposed by ACABQ in paragraph 9 of its report (E/ICEF/1989/AB/L.16) and its intention to consider the question in January 1990. Lastly, it favoured suspension of the deliberations as proposed by the representative of Canada.

12. Miss ZINDOGA (Zimbabwe) said she fully endorsed the statements made by the representatives of Liberia and Canada, and stressed the critical importance of a world summit, which would give world leaders an opportunity to commit themselves politically to improving the plight of children. With regard to the planning committee, she considered that the formula proposed by the initiators was the most likely to ensure the success of the summit.

13. Mrs. NIKOLIC (Yugoslavia) reiterated her firm support for the proposal to convene the summit, which should be organized at the highest level and be held in September 1990 in conjunction with the General Assembly session. Her delegation was not opposed to enlarging the planning committee. She supported the proposal of the African group concerning the budget floors for the summit and the mobilization activities.

14. Mrs. MBELLA NGOMBA (Cameroon) said she fully supported the comments by the representatives of Liberia and Canada. Despite the regrettable procedural differences which still existed, there was a consensus concerning the overall objective of the summit. The preparations for the summit should begin without delay, for otherwise it would not be effective.

15. Mrs. SYAHRUDDIN (Indonesia) reaffirmed her support for the initiative in its original form and expressed regret that agreement had not yet been reached. She nevertheless hoped that, given the purpose of the summit, all would endeavour to ensure its success. She endorsed the Canadian representative's proposal that the session should be suspended in order to facilitate the resolution of outstanding issues.

16. Mr. KATSIGAZI (Uganda) said he fully endorsed the position set forth by Liberia on behalf of the African group, particularly with regard to the planning committee and the proposed budget floor and ceiling for the summit and the mobilization activities. In particular, he stressed the importance of retaining the proposed date which, for the African countries, would correspond to the beginning of the Decade of the African Child.

17. Mr. KABIR (Bangladesh) said he welcomed the overwhelming support for the six-Government initiative. He hoped that the flexibility which had prevailed thus far would make it possible to overcome all the differences which still existed and that the summit would be held without delay. Since the summit would chart an effective course for children of the world in the 1990s, it was to be hoped that a way would be found to work together towards that common goal.

18. Mrs. DIMARTINO (United States of America) commended the wise words of the representative of Canada. The summit should produce results that would benefit children immediately. Since the planning modalities had a decisive influence on the type and quality of participation in the summit and hence on its success, the differences of opinion which still persisted in that regard were far from being an ancillary problem. She reaffirmed the importance of consensus and supported the Canadian proposal that consideration of the question should be postponed so as to facilitate the emergence of consensus.

19. Mr. DING Yuan Hong (China) recalled the points on which consensus had already been reached and observed that the summit still had to be organized and prepared. He hoped that the six initiators of the project, who had already done much in that regard, would continue their work. The planning committee could be expanded slightly so as to reflect a wider range of opinions. He sincerely hoped that all parties would demonstrate understanding, co-operation and flexibility so as to ensure the success of the proposed summit for the benefit of children all over the world.

20. Mr. MONTANO (Mexico) observed that the draft proposals presented respectively by Canada (E/ICEF/1989/CRP.31) and by the Netherlands (E/ICEF/1989/CRP.33) during the informal consultations contained a number of common points which could form the basis of a consensus, especially since the consultations held thus far had shown

(Mr. Montano, Mexico)

that the parties involved were flexible. His delegation supported the Canadian proposal that the debate should be resumed early in January 1990.

21. Mr. SASITORN (Thailand) said he supported the historic initiative concerning the convening of a summit for children. He welcomed the flexibility shown by all parties concerned and hoped that the consultations would continue constructively and lead to consensus concerning the preparatory arrangements.

22. Mr. QURESHI (Pakistan) said he fully supported the statement by the representative of Canada. As a result of the intensive efforts made during the past two days, some progress had been made towards consensus. Unfortunately, that progress was not enough. His delegation, wishing to preserve the character of the summit, thought that, as proposed by the representative of Canada, the Board should give itself more time and take the issue up again in January.

23. Ms. EHRENREICH (Observer for Denmark) said she fully supported the comments made by the Netherlands representative. Agreement still had to be reached on an acceptable planning mechanism, but that should be possible if all parties demonstrated flexibility.

24. Mr. ALI (Sudan) said he welcomed the initiative for a world summit for children, which had been approved immediately by the President of his country. He supported all the comments made by the representative of Liberia, especially those relating to the date of the summit and the enlargement of the planning committee.

25. Mr. ELIASSON (Sweden) said he associated himself completely with the statement by the representative of Canada. The contributions to the discussion had been very constructive and promising and in view of the many points common to the various positions he trusted that a solution would be found for the pending problems and that flexibility would sooner or later lead to consensus without jeopardizing the political intentions of the initiative. Suspending the debate did not mean interrupting it and if time could facilitate consensus, consideration of the issue should be temporarily deferred.

26. Mr. KAGAMI (Japan) said there was apparently broad agreement on convening a world summit for children in 1990. However, two questions had to be clarified. First, it was necessary to agree on the role to be played by the Executive Board in connection with the summit, or the linkage between the summit and the United Nations. He did not think that question could be settled at the current special session, and hence the Chairman should be requested to adjourn the meeting and reconvene the session early in 1990. With regard to the budget issue, which had still not been resolved, the Executive Board should agree to establish a budget ceiling for the summit itself and for the related mobilization activities, since that would make it possible to expedite the preparations. However, if the initiators considered that the second point could not be separated from the first, namely the role of the Exeucitve Board in relation to the summit, the session would have to be resumed in 1990.

27. Mr. SALAZAR-SANCISI (Observer for Ecuador) recalled that during the debate in the General Assembly the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ecuador had supported the idea of convening a world summit for children. The proposed date for the summit, which would be held during the forty-fifth session of the General Assembly, was appropriate and the planning committee should be enlarged. The flexibility already demonstrated by the members of the Executive Board gave grounds for hope that the efforts to reach a solution to the questions concerning the preparations for the summit would soon succeed.

28. The CHAIRMAN noted that consensus had been reached on certain points, namely the convening of a summit at the highest possible level during the forty-fifth session of the General Assembly, for which UNICEF would provide secretariat services. The outstanding issue concerned the planning committee. It had been proposed that the special session should not be closed so that consultations could continue. If consensus could not be reached by the next day, she suggested that the special session should be suspended and resumed at a future date, which according to the secretariat could be 10 January 1990.

29. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.